

**PROCEEDINGS**

OF THE

**STATE SILK CONVENTION,**

OF

**PENNSYLVANIA,**

HELD AT LANCASTER, ON THE 2d AND 3d OF DECEMBER, 1839.

—  
**LANCASTER:**

J. W. FORNEY, PRINTER.

—  
1839.

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2017 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

## **PROCEEDINGS**

OF THE

# **SILK CONVENTION.**



The State Silk Society met, pursuant to adjournment, on the 2d of December, 1839, in Lancaster, at the house of William Cooper, at 10 o'clock, A. M.

The President, Hon. C. Blythe, took the Chair and called the Society to order, when Samuel C. Humes, of Humesville, was appointed Secretary. The object of the society was stated by the President, when the Secretary, by request, read the Constitution of the State Silk Society; after which, on motion of Gen. Diller, the society adjourned to meet in the Court House, at 2 o'clock, P. M.

According to adjournment, the society met in the Court House, when the following gentlemen became members by paying one dollar each into the funds of the society:—Wm. Brown, John Wilbank, John Clark, Philadelphia; D. Goheen, Wm. Mathiot, J. F. Markley, Columbia; Harmand Odier, Germantown, Jonas Nolt, Lancaster county.

On motion of Gen. Diller, a committee was appointed on items of business to bring before the convention, when the Chair appointed the following:—Messrs. Diller, Wilbank, Houston, Humes and Reed. The committee having retired, on motion of H. P. Carson, the Secretary read the Rev. D. V. McLean's Experiments on raising silk, at Freehold, N. J., addressed to the executive committee of the American Silk Society.

216843

Items of business reported for the society:

1st. A committee to draft an address to the people of Pennsylvania upon the importance of the culture of silk.

*Committee.*—John Clark, Dr. W. L. Atlee, H. R. Reed.

2d. A committee to report a preamble and resolutions to the State Silk Society.

*Committee.*—Gen. A. Diller, Wm. Brown, Wm. Mathiot.

3d. A committee to arrange and report the productions of the present and past seasons in silk, and also which are the best worms to be cultivated, and the best mulberry tree to feed from.

*Committee.*—H. P. Carson, Ab'm. Herr, John Wilbank.

Mr. Clark, chairman of the committee on the 1st item, reported a lengthy and able address, exhibiting a thorough knowledge of the culture and manufacture of silk.

Gen. Diller, chairman of the committee on the 2d item, reported the following:

WHEREAS, The people of the United States have, by habit, become extravagant consumers of SILK; the increase in the importation of this article has become alarming; and the great debt incurred abroad for the article of silk bears hard on the Country, in a time like the present, when specie is required to liquidate the difference of exchange against the Country.

AND WHEREAS, our country is by nature adapted to make Silk a staple of our soil. Our climate, our land, and the industrious habits and ingenuity of our people, are all calculated to make this land of *freedom*, a silk growing and a silk manufacturing country. The project, however, like all others, requires its pioneers, who are seldom, if ever, benefitted by a new enterprise. It is however a duty that some few should lead the way to this new source of wealth and felicity to the country, aware that those of our farmers and citizens who at present ridicule the idea of this becoming a silk growing country, will engage in the pursuit as soon as they can be convinced it will be to their interest to do so. It is therefore necessary that the public be made acquainted with the advantage and simplicity of cultivating a portion of it with their other pursuits.

*Resolved*, that this Society recommend to the public the great necessity of raising silk in our country, and that measures be taken to diffuse the requisite information.

*Resolved*, That our delegates to the National Silk Convention be authorized and required to confer with our members in Congress, and take such measures in regard to the Tariff on imported silk as to them may appear advisable.

*Resolved*, That our members in Congress be invited to attend and assist in protecting the interests of Pennsylvania in the National Silk Convention, to be held at Washington, on the 11th of December, 1839.

*Resolved*, That the County Societies be invited to connect themselves with the State Silk Society at their next annual meeting in Harrisburg, on the 19th day of February next.

*Resolved*, That the Secretary and Vice President be requested to have the proceedings of this meeting arranged and published, and pay the expense out of

the funds of the Society, and that the Secretary forward to each member of the Society a pamphlet containing a copy of the proceedings of this meeting, when published, which, after some debate, was unanimously adopted; after which the following gentlemen were appointed to represent the State Silk Society in the National Convention to assemble at Washington, on the 11th of December, 1839:

Gen. A. Diller, Henry P. Carson, Wm. Brown and S. C. Humes.

Mr. Carson, chairman of the committee on the 3d item, will report to the State Silk Society, at its meeting at Harrisburg, in February next.

Messrs. Moorehead, Brown and Clark appeared as delegates from the National Association for the promotion of the silk culture in the United States.

The society was addressed by Messrs. Clark and Wilbank, of Philadelphia, on the subject of silk, much to the interest of the members present. The society adjourned to meet at 7 o'clock in the evening.

The Society met pursuant to adjournment, when, according to the regulations of the society, the President, Hon. Calvin Blythe, delivered an able and appropriate address. After which Mr. Gould, of Beaver, was called upon to address the society, which he did at some length, highly gratifying to the ladies and gentlemen present; at the same time he exhibited seven different patterns of ribbons, made on one loom at the same time, at Economy, Beaver county, at which place an extensive manufactory of silk, in all its various branches, is in successful operation, and where raw silk will always find a ready market at the highest prices.

Various specimens of raw and manufactured silk were also exhibited to the Society by Messrs. Wilbank, Carson, Herr and Humes.

The Society adjourned to meet at 10 o'clock to-morrow morning.

#### TUESDAY MORNING.

The Society met pursuant to adjournment, when considerable discussion arose relative to instructions to our delegates to the National Convention, upon the subject of duty on imported silks.

On motion of R. W. Houston, the following was adopted:

*Resolved*, That the Secretary in his notice for the annual meeting of this Society, in February next, at Harrisburg, respectfully invite all County Silk Societies, Silk Associations, and individuals engaged in the culture and manufacture of silk, to send delegates and reports of their proceedings to the State Silk Society.

On motion of Mr. Clark, the following was adopted:

*Resolved*, That the Secretary be instructed to prepare such part of the proceedings for publication as are necessary, and that the President's address be added.

On motion. The Society adjourned to meet in Harrisburg, on the 19th of February next, at 10 o'clock, A. M.



Hon. CALVIN BLYTHE, President of the Society, delivered the following address:

*To the Members of the Pennsylvania Silk Society:*

GENTLEMEN:—In obedience to the Constitution of our Society, the following remarks on its objects and interests are respectfully submitted:—

The embarrassment to which our country has been subjected since the organization of our society has given to its objects increased importance. Whatever may have been the immediate causes of our commercial difficulties, the ultimate cause must be traced to the excess of importations beyond the exports from our country. The remedy is thus plainly indicated—to effect an equalization either by lessening the imports or by increasing the exports. The imports may be lessened by simply abstaining from the use of articles heretofore imported. This may be resorted to beneficially to some extent: But the industrious habits of our people would make it more acceptable to have afforded to them an opportunity to produce those articles which their comfort or custom seems to have rendered indispensable. To be content with a scant supply of the conveniences of civilized life, in order to indulge in indolence, is not in accordance with the genius of our people. To produce those articles, we can no longer purchase from abroad, is the alternative most worthy of consideration. Already has the persevering genius of our people succeeded in demonstrating that one important and indispensable article heretofore obtained from abroad to an amount not less than twenty millions of dollars, will hereafter be supplied, and more than supplied, from our domestic resources. I need hardly say that I refer to the successful experiments in smelting iron ore with anthracite coal. This will cut off at once and forever the necessity of importing a bar of iron from abroad. Time is only required to erect the necessary furnaces to enable us to produce a sufficiency of metal to supply the country—our countrymen are abundantly competent in manufacturing skill to convert it into shape fitted for the uses principally required.

Can we not by our exertions aid in striking from the list of imported articles another important item—by adding to it our home productions? The value of silk imported into our country exceeds twenty millions, and probably does not fall short of twenty-five millions of dollars. This amount, if not checked by a home production, will annually increase. It becomes a national question whether silk can be profitably produced in this country? —and if so, whether it can be produced in sufficient quantity without interfering with other equally profitable pursuits, to supersede its importation, or to supply for export a sufficiency of the raw material to pay for the manufactured articles that may continue to be imported?

7

Silk has been profitably cultivated for many years in New England. The sewing silk produced there has long been known to be superior to the imported sewing silk. Silk was produced in Pennsylvania before and during the revolutionary war, and also in Virginia and Georgia. The great objection to its continued culture was, the time required to produce the Italian mulberry, the only tree then used, and the expense in gathering the leaves of that tree, which are very small. Besides, silk was not very extensively used until late years in our country, as the list of imports will shew, and it was not generally known that the raw material could be sold in a foreign market. The objection to the time required to rear the mulberry tree has been entirely removed by the introduction to our country, about two years ago, of the morus multicaulis. This tree which don't appear to have been known in Europe till within fifteen years, can be produced as cheaply and more speedily than a crop of corn. By means of cuttings of single buds a twig of morus multicaulis, three or four feet long, will produce from ten to twenty plants, which, cultivated after the manner of corn, will in a few weeks from planting supply leaves fit to feed the silk worm. What is chiefly required for the successful raising of the silk worm, is a climate moderately warm and free from excessive moisture. The climate of our country from Maine to Georgia has been found on trial well fitted for the healthy growth of the silk worm. Its greater dryness, compared with those parts of Europe where silk has been cultivated, gives it a decided preference. The texture of the silk made here is stronger than the silk produced in Europe and is preferred by the European manufacturer, who will give twenty-five per cent. more for American silk than for European.

This preference for American silk on account of its superior quality, secures us a market for the raw material, should it not be found practicable or profitable to manufacture it here. It has been ascertained by intelligent men who have instituted inquiries, that upwards of fifty millions of dollars worth of raw silk could now be sold in the European market, if America could furnish it. The knowledge of this fact should remove all apprehension from the minds of our countrymen, that the article if produced could not be sold. There is no possibility of overstocking the market for many years.

Until within a few years, little was known of the manner of cultivating silk, in our country. Since information has been diffused on the subject many persons in various parts of our country have made trial of its culture. In nearly every instance the trial has been attended with success. It may be asserted that the result of the experiments, has satisfied all who have taken pains to inform themselves, of the practicability of cultivating it profitably throughout our entire country. The knowledge of this result only needs to be diffused extensively to induce our countrymen to add the important item of silk to their other valuable agricultural products. There is no country, not even China, better adapted to the culture of silk, than Pennsylvania. Would our interest be promoted by its extensive cultivation? It may be thought that the prices which our agricultural products have maintained for a number of years should make us careful about diverting any portion of our labor or capital into new and untried channels. In connection with this subject it may be well to consider some of the causes that have contributed to maintain these prices in order that the indications of their continuance may be noticed. The high prices of cotton for some years has induced the southern planter to turn all his hands to growing cotton, to the neglect of the necessary bread stuffs; these, therefore, had to be procured from the grain growing states. The present depressed price of cotton will compel the cotton planter to raise his own subsistence. The extensive improvements carried on in nearly all the States, not only

diverted large numbers from agricultural pursuits, but made it necessary that the persons employed on the public works should be supplied with the necessary subsistence by those that continued their agricultural occupations. The impossibility in procuring funds from Europe will arrest many of the public works—and thus throw back upon agriculture many persons employed on these works. Instead of mere consumers they will become producers. The demand for our grain in Europe, to which we are mainly indebted for the present prices, being the consequence of an accidental scarcity, is not to be relied on even for one year more. Such a scarcity has not occurred for many years, and may not soon occur again. We know that for the last two years grain was sent in considerable quantities from Europe to this country, and at moderate prices.

It seems, therefore, we should be admonished by considerations like these, not to rely with great confidence on our agricultural products maintaining their former or present prices. If the prices should decline, the advantage of having another article added to our present products, that could be promptly and profitably produced, is obvious. It then becomes an interesting question, whether silk does not present to our use such an article? It being beyond doubt that there will be a demand for all the silk that can be produced in our country for many years, the only inquiry need be, whether it can be profitably produced? There has been but a short time since the introduction of *morus multicaulis*, in which to make the experiment. During the past season and the summer of 1838 the experiment has been made by many persons, both in Pennsylvania and the neighboring states, which has afforded entire satisfaction of the practicability of cultivating silk profitably in Pennsylvania, as well as in the other states of the Union. Philadelphia county, Lancaster, Harrisburg, and Beaver county, may be referred to as places where the experiment has been successfully made. In Beaver county silk has been manufactured in considerable quantities into satins, ribbons and other articles of a quality equal to the best articles of that description imported. At some stores in Philadelphia, domestic silk is to be found in considerable quantity and variety, and of an excellent quality.

The practicability not only of producing but also of manufacturing silk extensively in our country is already made manifest.

With regard to the profit of its culture, the very largeness of it has made it hard to be believed. Yet its value in reference to individual profit seems to be as well established as any fact relating to agriculture. In Pennsylvania, in Maryland, in New Jersey and Ohio, besides in New England and some of the Southern States, individuals of unquestioned character for intelligence and integrity have borne testimony to the large profits derived from its culture, with comparatively small expenditure of either labor or capital and in a very short space of time, less than is ordinarily required to realize the profits on a crop of corn.

It is fairly deducible from the experiments made that an acre of ground, of such quality as in a season ordinarily favorable would produce twenty bushels of wheat, if planted with *morus multicaulis* and worms fed on its leaves, the first year would produce upwards of one hundred dollars profit beyond all expenses, in silk alone, without regard to the value of the tree itself. That in each succeeding year for at least five years the profits would be increased by one third, which in five years would yield a profit of upwards of three hundred dollars from one acre. To accomplish this result on several acres but few hands are required, so few as to be within reach of most farmers to cultivate two or three acres without materially interfering with their other pursuits. Some knowledge of the subject is of course indispensable; but that knowledge, by means of books and periodicals devoted to diffusing knowledge in the silk culture, is now within reach of

any one desirous to obtain it. With the requisite skill, which may be readily acquired, and with ordinary care, the trees are as easily cultivated as a crop of corn, whilst the silk worm is not more difficult to preserve than other caterpillars.

The State of Pennsylvania, by an act of the Legislature passed at its session of 1837-8, gives a bounty of twenty cents for every pound of cocoons, and fifty cents for every pound of reeled silk raised within the state. This bounty will go far towards indemnifying the silk grower for the expense incurred in producing the silk, and consequently leave nearly the whole price of the silk clear profit. This would make the profit the first year, agreeably to above estimate, upwards of \$225 per acre. There is now a market within the state of Pennsylvania, either at Philadelphia, or other points, for all the silk that can be produced, either in cocoons or reeled silk. Cocoons are worth from 40 to 50 cents per pound and reeled silk is worth from five to six dollars per pound. Five hundred pounds of cocoons may be obtained from the leaves of one acre of *morus multicaulis* the first year; nine pounds of cocoons will produce one pound of reeled silk.

Although the *morus multicaulis* will grow more luxuriantly on a rich soil, it will grow well on a comparatively poor soil, whilst the leaves of the tree grown on a light soil produce silk of a finer quality than those grown on a rich soil. Much of our light soil that cannot be profitably used for grain is well adapted to the growth of the mulberry.

If then it be satisfactorily ascertained that silk can be made one of our staples—that it is an object of great importance in a national point of view; whilst it offers a certain source of large individual profit; that Pennsylvania, in soil, climate, and in the habits of our people, is especially adapted to the introduction of this valuable staple, it only remains that our fellow-citizens should be informed and assured of the facts upon which these views and results are based, to be induced to avail themselves of the advantages they hold forth, and thus secure themselves against the consequences of a material depression in the other staples of our state.

In the commencement of a new business all will not succeed to the extent of their expectations on the first trial. Many are led by a single any failure to abandon the pursuit as impracticable. If such would bear in mind how often they have failed in obtaining a crop of corn, of wheat, or of of our staple products, and yet have persisted in their cultivation, they should not despair if some of the many accidents to which every pursuit is exposed, or want of familiarity with the subject, should for once defeat their expectations.

The alleged low price of the *morus multicaulis*, and the seeming want of demand for it, have led some to suppose that the entire silk project had exploded. No supposition can be more unwarrantable. The tree is only important as a necessary means of producing silk. If, when the season for planting returns, the tree can be procured at a reduced price, it will afford the means of its more wide diffusion among those intending to cultivate silk. The great importance and certain value of silk, as one of the products of our country, is established, irrespective of the profits to be derived from the mere culture of the mulberry. The profits on the rearing of the tree, is of moment, beyond those immediately interested, merely as tending to afford a prompt and ample supply for its wide diffusion.

As the spread of correct information among the citizens of our state would very much tend to secure the immediate and extensive cultivation of silk, editors of newspapers would essentially advance the public interest by transferring to their columns, frequently, articles from the periodicals devoted exclusively to that subject. The formation of societies in each county would aid much in collecting information and bringing it to notice of the public generally.

The calculations with regard to profit which have been submitted are based or payment of the full price of labor; and still are below what has been realized by many—but much of the labor required can, in fact, be performed by boys between nine and twelve years old, and much of it by women. This is an advantage that should not be passed over without an observation. It is known that since the introduction of large manufacturing establishments into our country, the household manufacturing has been in a great measure discontinued, because it could not be kept up in competition with machinery. In consequence of this many women, dependent upon their labor, have been deprived of the only employment suitable to them. To such the introduction of the silk culture will be valuable, by affording them a profitable employment every way suited to their circumstances.

The members of this Society, coming from various parts of the State, will be prepared to furnish much valuable information, which, through the instrumentality of the society, can be communicated to the public.

The indications everywhere throughout our country give ground to believe that our object will be speedily attained. Let us be encouraged to exert ourselves with a zeal becoming the cause in which we are engaged, and we shall soon have the satisfaction to know that we have contributed in some degree to the accomplishment of a great national object, by means of which a new and fruitful source of wealth shall have been secured to our country, affording an additional field to the enterprise of our countrymen and an ample reward to their industry.

CALVIN BLYTHE.

Lancaster, Dec. 2d, 1839.



